

Melodeon Hall
132-138 West Second Street
Rushville
Rush County
Indiana

HABS No. IN-97

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MELODEON HALL

HABS No.IN-97

Location: 132-138 West Second Street, Rushville, Rush County, Indiana

Present Owners: Thomas W. Smith, Rt. 1, Arlington, Indiana; Mrs. Wendell Willkie, Rt. 5, Rushville, Indiana; Wayne Benedict, 415 West 9th Street, Rushville, Indiana.

Present Occupants: There are stores on the first floor, but the second floor is unoccupied.

Significance: This Italianate building was at one time the cultural and social center of Rush County. Architecturally, the building is representative of a two-story, multiple-use building with stores on the first floor and a performance hall on the second floor, a type that was relatively common in small Indiana towns.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of crection: 1872
2. Architect: Unknown
3. Alterations and additions: During World War II, a small stage was built to the right of the original stage. Also during this period, a suspended ceiling was installed backstage. The original stage was removed sometime prior to 1973. On the exterior, there are modern storefronts on the six eastern bays of the first story.

B. Historical Context:

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Melodeon Hall was the social and cultural center of Rush County. Events held here included plays, lectures, concerts, dances, political rallies, and high school graduations. While many of these events involved only local citizens, prominent national figures also made appearances here.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Italianate style with round-arched windows and doors. With commercial space on the lower floor and an auditorium above, the building is typical of mixed-use buildings built in Indiana during the period.
2. Condition of fabric: The first-floor stores have undergone major alterations, and the upper hall has been divided by a partition and the stage removed.

B. Description of exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Approximately 82' (12-bay front) x 72'; 2 stories; rectangular plan.
2. Foundations: Rough ashlar.
3. Walls: Red brick laid in common bond and painted green on the first floor. On the south front only, there is a squared stone string course above the low stone foundation.
4. Structural system: Brick bearing walls and wood joists and rafters. There may be a few metal beams in the roof at column lines, but these were not accessible.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: The stores have concrete steps. The hall entrance on the west side has a stone slab step.
6. Chimneys: Brick, flush to the wall and without a cap.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and Doors: On the west facade, the hall door has two panels, plywood side panels on each side of the wood frame and a horizontal transom. An arched opening above the transom is filled in. A narrower adjacent opening is similar. On the south front, there are four entrances. The two northern entrances are parts of modern storefronts. On the south, the original entrances are round-arched and separated from each other by round-arched windows. This arcade is articulated by stone keystones and impost blocks.

- b. Windows and shutters: On the south front, the first floor windows on the north are part of modern storefronts. On the south, the arcaded window openings are only glazed in the lower portions. Tall, narrow, round-arched windows on the second floor have been boarded up and are decorated by brick archivols and stone keystones and impost blocks. On the west side, first floor windows are a combination of rectangular and round openings. The fenestration of the second floor is similar to that on the south front.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape and covering: The roof was not accessible, but the parapet configuration indicates a slope from north to south and built-up roofing.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Projecting boxed cornice with a moulded fascia and wide frieze, decorated by modillions and brackets.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: Three commercial spaces, extending from front to rear.
- b. Second floor: A side hall on the north contains a projecting ticket booth. The main hall and an adjoining room are on the south side of the hall. A door at the eastern end of the hall opens into a room, which in turn opens onto the backstage area.

2. Stairways: Single run stair in the northwest corner. The width of the stair has been reduced by a partition. Basement access is through a street hatch or store hatches.

3. Flooring: Wood plank.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Painted plaster.

5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The doors of the auditorium have four simple moulded panels in two tiers and transoms above.

6. Decorative features and trim: Window and door trim of the main hall is architrave trim stained oak. The two cast iron columns of the hall are tapered, fluted and have Corinthian-like capitals. The proscenium is intact, although the original stage has been removed.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The building sits on a corner in the downtown area and conforms to its urbane setting by abutting the sidewalk and sharing party walls on its east and north sides.

Prepared by: Mort Karp
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ADDENDUM TO
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